



# SHALOM OF SAFED

*RETROSPECTIVE*

THE NEW YORK CULTURAL CENTER

*in association with Fairleigh Dickinson University*

THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON D.C.

FALL 1972



### One-man museum exhibits:

The Jewish Museum, New York, 1961; 1964  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1967  
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1967  
Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1967  
Kunsthaus Museum, Zurich, 1968  
Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, 1968  
Whitechapel Galleries, London, 1969  
Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 1971  
The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1971

### In the Museum collections of:

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
The National Museum of Modern Art, Paris.  
The Philadelphia Museum of Art.  
The museums listed above.

Gallery shows in Tel Aviv, New York,  
Detroit, Chicago, Paris, Bern, and Zurich.  
In *Israel a Travers Les Ages Petit*  
Palais, Paris and numerous group shows.

Every artist is a phenomenon, a quirk of nature that singles one person out of many to do a special thing. Not many artists, however, are isolated phenomena. With very few exceptions, the work of all artists can be traced to models of work by other artists, and ordinarily many influences are evident, even in the most original work. When an artist produces objects in which are impossible to trace influences, he is a phenomenon of unusual rarity.

Shalom of Safed is one of these exceedingly rare events: A very fine artist whose work reaches back to no discernible artistic tradition and shows no evidence of active influence from the contemporary art world. It is difficult to grasp the reality of a man who can be so complete as an artist and yet so untouched by art.

Shalom, in fact, does not consider himself an artist. He thinks of himself as a teller of Bible stories. While it is true that his pictures often read like a page of printed Hebrew—from top to bottom, right to left—he is far more than an illustrator of narrative. . . .

His visual world is as flat as the paper he draws on. There is no perspective or any other "sophisticated" device suggesting depth. (This is one of the reasons Shalom is called a "primitive," but the word is no more accurately applied to Shalom than to African art. It's a word we could do without.) He outlines his subjects and fills them with color, breezing into complete pictorial unity, as tight as a Byzantine mosaic, without apparent effort. . . .

Shalom is full of witty, colorful surprises. His individualistic color choices range from rich neutral tints to cheerful Middle East yellows and reds. The extent of the range and the subtlety of variation are far from "primitive." His handling of the acrylics combines a confident looseness with a craftsman's discipline, and gives each area a textural richness.

Reading his pictures from object to object provides the most interesting discoveries. Shalom's main concern is to make a pictographic representation of his subjects, but he is unable to restrain a brilliantly innovative mind. Clouds, for instance, occur in many pictures, but they are never the same, and it is surprising how many of his stylizations come out looking like something Matisse or Picasso or Dubuffet might have invented.

—William Tall

**The Detroit Free Press**

The early French masters of this century, particularly the Nabis and the Fauves, have taught us much about the value of presenting the world in a new and fresh way through an "innocent eye"; the so-called primitive or naive approach can often reveal truths in a subject that are obscured by overlays of sophistication.

Shalom of Safed is an Israeli artist who began painting late in life and whose illuminated works did not become known in the West until the early 'sixties. Confining himself to Jewish history from the Old Testament and from the Talmud, his works "read" like manuscripts, often following a path from right to left as Hebrew does. But they are no Dead Sea scrolls whose messages are lost to time and place. Their very naiveté gives them an immediacy, a force of conviction and a direct honesty that convinces us of the artist's own fervid beliefs and makes us believe in them ourselves.

One could call these works Symbolist, for like Blake they have poetic texts folded into their design and they allude to poetic descriptions. Similar to Byzantine wall frescoes there is a serial arrangement of action in tiers that tells the story comic-strip fashion, up, down and across the page. But apart from all this, the colour, the structural organization and curiously archaic draughtsmanship have an ability to repeat these old legends in a new and charming way, as though we had never heard them recited before and were seeing them for the first time.

Shalom, who is in his seventies, has always said, "I paint what I see in my head, and what I read in the Bible and the commentaries." But there is no desire to live entirely in dreamworlds, and his works can readily depict a Moses in bermuda shorts, Philistines in Palm Beach shirts and a Jerusalem fronded with electric lampposts. At times as whimsical as his own works, Shalom of Safed, who belongs to the orthodox Hasidic sect (which traditionally frowns on graven images), excuses his art on the grounds that, "I do not paint paintings. I tell the story of the Bible in line and colour."

**Mario Amaya**  
Director  
New York Cultural Center

*"Excellent paintings, manage to do what is close to the impossible—express traditional religious belief in a contemporary way. . . ."*

**The New York Times**

*"Shalom's work has a simplicity, a greatness and a poetry that makes us think of the greatest primitives."*

**Figaro Littéraire, Paris**

*"A new star was born in the world of native art. Shalom of Safed has appeared almost simultaneously in the skies of Europe and America, and has taken his place among the brightest lights of folk art."*

**Gaphis, Zurich**

*"Naive, but not primitive, Shalom of Safed's paintings are delightful, very Eastern and surprisingly sophisticated in their lively rendering of Biblical scenes. These paintings are so well-fashioned and so joyful that art criticism is irrelevant. Shalom's sense of design is faultless; his colors strong and subtle. Despite the rejection of conventional perspective, his pictures are not patchworthy and often have a high degree of abstraction. Symbols are used freshly and emblematically. His work has a rare and serene grandeur rarely found in art with such an anecdotal basis."*

**Art International, Zurich**

*"Shalom is one of the great folk artists of our age."*

**Art & Artists, London**

*"Israel's leading primitive . . . clings to Biblical themes, re-imagining them with an astonishing sense of humor and an endearing playfulness. In design and color, these works are small miracles of sophistication. And no matter how busy the surfaces, an instinctive pictorial "rightness" lends unity and authority. Shalom of Safed is an original."*

**New York Magazine**

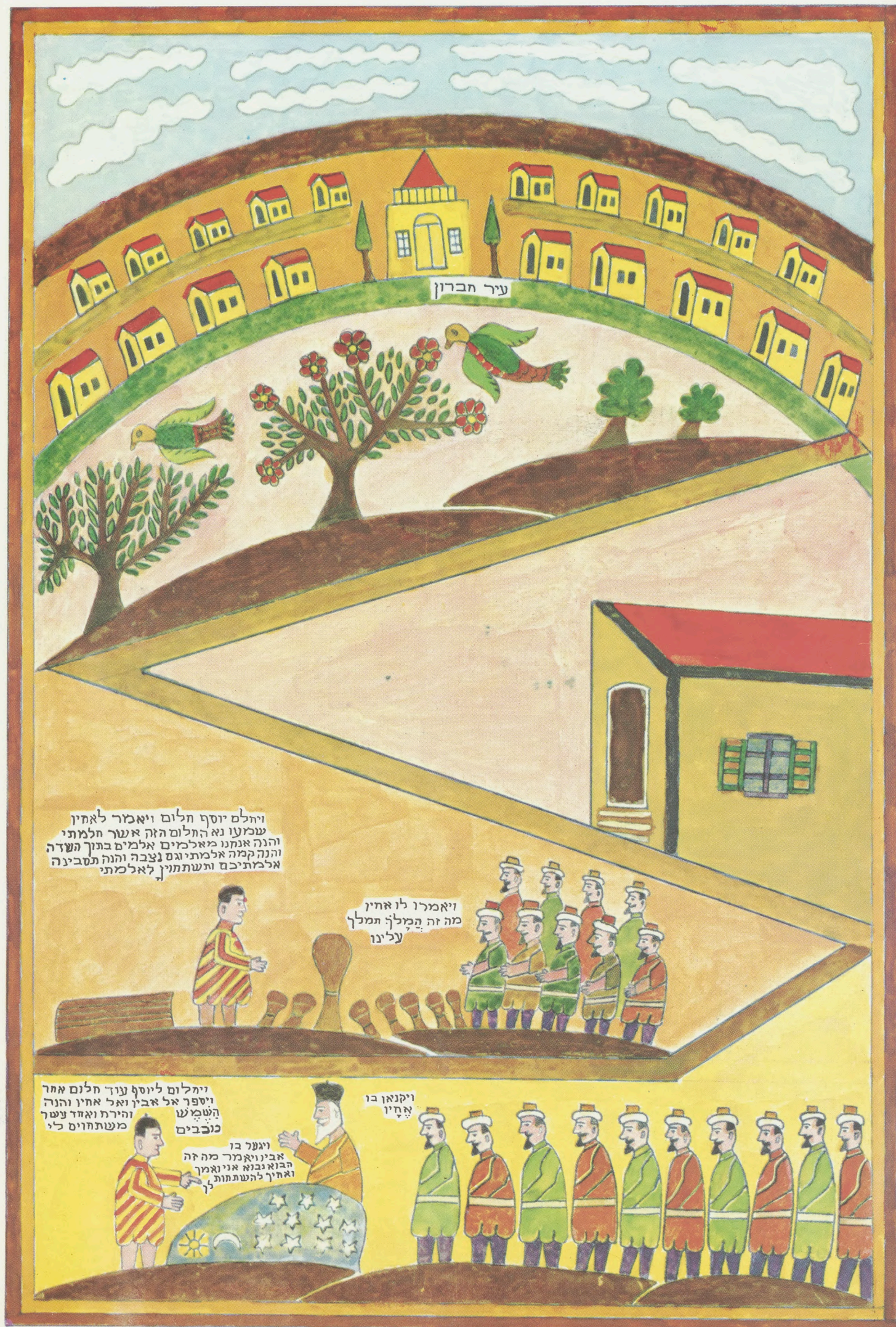




בראשית ברא ה' את השמים ואת הארץ  
והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וישך על פני תהום ויאמר  
ה' יהי אור ויהי אור

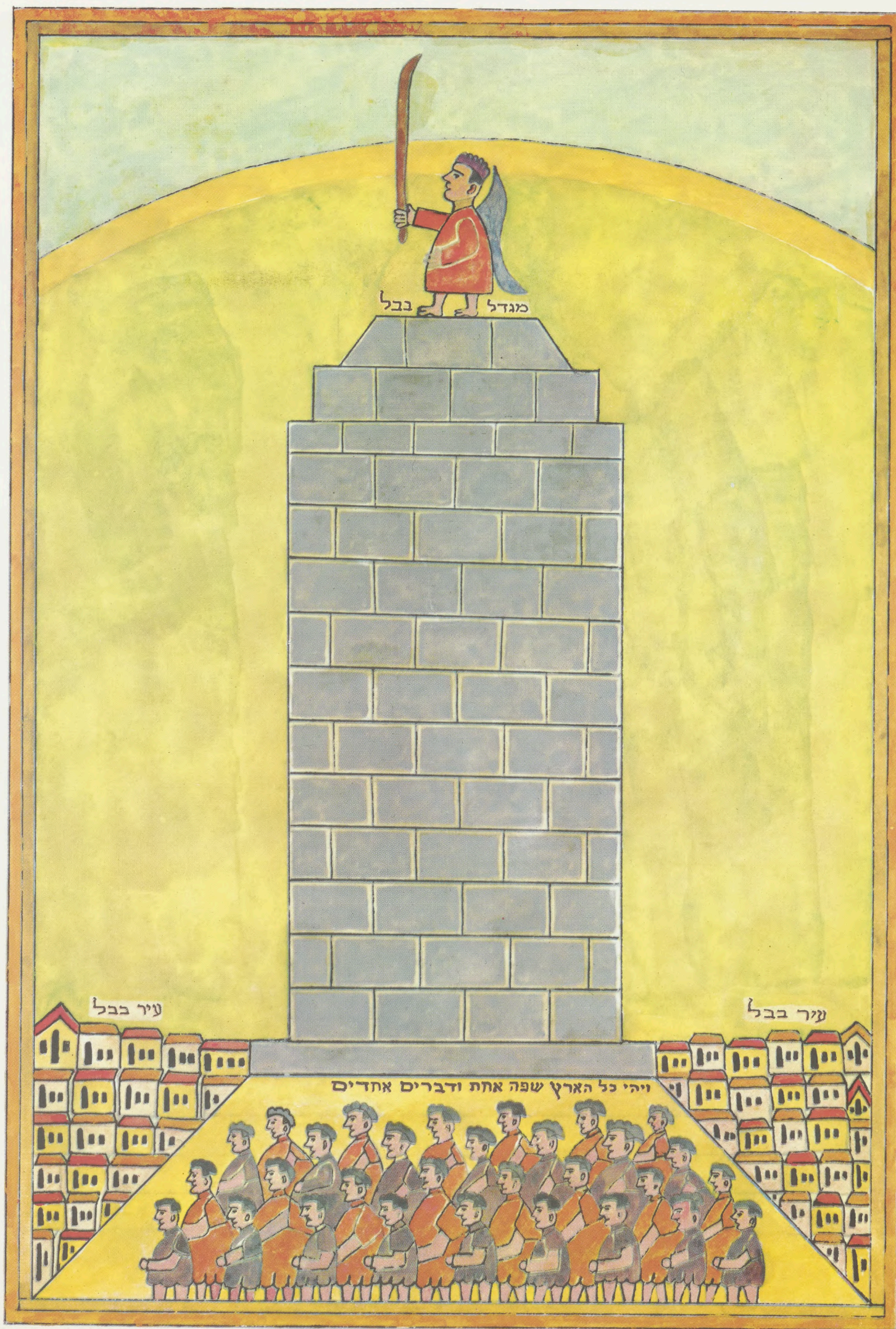
Genesis — The Separation of Light from Darkness (chapter 1)





Wearing his coat of many colors, Joseph relates his dreams to his father Jacob and his jealous brothers (Genesis 37)





From the top of the Tower of Babel (or Babylon, seen at its foot) the Lord confounds the tongues of men (Genesis 11)



ויקח אברם את כל  
רכושם ויצאו ללכת  
ארצה כנען כאשר דבר  
אליו ה'

זה אברם



Abraham and Lot, with their possessions, set out from Haran (top right) for the promised land of Canaan (Genesis 12)





זה לוח





The Lord smites the firstborn of Egypt, both men and beasts (Exodus 12). At bottom are the Egyptian harvest and the Nile (Genesis 1)





Adam and Eve eat from the Tree of Knowledge, cover themselves, and are expelled from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3)





Moses descends from Mount Sinai, which quakes and flames with the Lord's presence, to his people waiting below (Exodus 19-32)



THE SHALOM OF SAFED RETROSPECTIVE  
IS UNDER THE SPONSORSHIP OF

THE AMERICA — ISRAEL CULTURAL FOUNDATION  
AND  
THE EMBASSY OF ISRAEL  
ITZHAK RABIN, AMBASSADOR.

CHAIRMEN OF THE RECEPTION COMMITTEE  
BESS MYERSON  
SENATOR JACOB JAVITZ  
ELIE WEISEL

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following museums and collectors for their loans to this exhibit:

The Museum of Modern Art, New York (gift of Mr. & Mrs. J. Stern).  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (gift of Mr. & Mrs. J. Aberbach).  
The Philadelphia Museum of Art (gift of Mr. & Mrs. L. Stein).  
The Jewish Museum, New York (gift of Mr. & Mrs. L. Stein).  
Mr. & Mrs. D.M. Friedenberg.  
Mr. & Mrs. S. Gottesman.  
Dr. & Mrs. H. Rosen.  
Mr. & Mrs. S. Shalom.  
Dr. & Mrs. S. Shrut.  
Mr. & Mrs. J. Stern.  
Mr. & Mrs. T. Unterberg.  
Dr. & Mrs. M.L. Wiener.  
Mr. & Mrs. L. Beck  
Mr. & Mrs. I. Rubinstein  
Mr. & Mrs. J.J. Aberbach

All other paintings are from the collection of Mr. Daniel Doron.

MR. DANIEL DORON, NEW YORK, SHALOM'S SOLE REPRESENTATIVE.  
NEW YORK GALLERY REPRESENTING SHALOM — LEE AULT & CO. INC.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

O. Binhalji-Merin, "Masters of Naive Art," McGraw-Hill (New York), 1971, pp. 9, 239-243, 250-251, 298 ill.  
Dr. Alfred Werner, "Israel's Finest Naive Painter," *The Jewish Chronicle*, (London), December 1971, ill.  
*Today Magazine*, (Chicago), October 18, 1970, cover ill., pp. 8-9.  
Daniel Doron, "Grandpa Moses," *Art and Artists*, (London) Feb. '69 pp. 60-4 ill.  
Daniel Doron, "The Innocent Eye of Shalom," *Jewish Heritage*, (Washington, D.C.) Fall '69 pp. 45-52 ill.  
Anatole Jakowsky, *Lexicon of Primitive Painters*, Bassilius Press, (Basel) p. 349 ill.  
Daniel Doron, "Shalom . . . Det Uskyldige Øje," *Billedkunst*, (Copenhagen), no. 4, 1967, pp. 30-37, ill.  
"Expo '67," *Graphis*, (Zurich), no. 132, December 1967, pp. 356-337, ill.  
"Expo '67," *Interiors*, (New York), col. 6, June 1967, p. 97, ill.  
Lucy Lippard, "Review of Exhibition at the Gallery of Israeli Art," *Art International*, (Lugano), vol. X, no. 8, October 1966.  
*Newsweek*, (New York), May 1966, p. 86, ill.  
*Hadassah Magazine*, (New York), Passover 1965, cover ill.  
"The Bible in Art," *Life Magazine*, (New York), December 24, 1964, p. 84, ill.  
"Les Juifs," *L'Encyclopedie Essentielle*, (Paris), vol. 9, 1964, p. 144.  
Daniel Doron, *Creativity and Innocent Art*, Monograph of The Renaissance Society, (Chicago), February 1962, 4 pp.

*American Judaism*, (New York), vol. 2, no. 3, Spring 1962, cover ill.  
Raymond Cogniat, "Shalom of Safed," *Graphis*, (Zurich), no. 103, September-October 1962, pp. 516-523, ill.  
"The Innocent Eye of a Man of Galilee," *Horizon*, (New York), vol. 3, no. 6, July 1961, pp. 120-128, ill.  
"Biblical Artist," *Jubilee*, (New York), July 1961, pp. 13-17, ill.  
Robert St. John, "Leaders in the Fields of Art and Intellect," *Israel Volume Life World Library*, (New York), p. 113, ill.

#### SPECIAL PROJECTS:

"The Innocent Eye of a Man of Galilee" a 28 minute color film for ABC-TV awarded Cine's Golden Eagle, and Best Jewish Film of '68.  
Tapestry for the Israel Pavilion at the Montreal World's Fair, measuring 8 by 17 feet, and depicting The Prophets' Vision of Universal Peace and Plenty.  
Commentary Greeting Cards, 1968-9.  
B'nai B'rith Women's Greeting Cards, 1969.  
"Birds and Trees, UNICEF Greeting Card, 1966.  
"Shalom of Safed," *Camera 3*, CBS, March 12, 1961, half hour film.  
Triptych for the official New Year greeting card of Jerusalem's Mayor, Mr. Teddy Kollek, 1971.



